

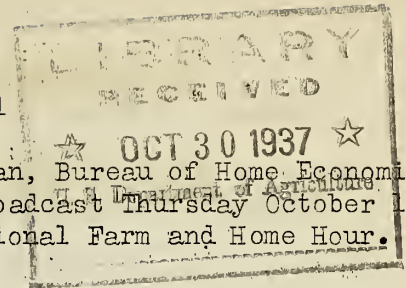
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HOUSEHOLD CALENDAR

Avocados for the Salad Bowl



A radio interview between Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, and Mr. Morse Salisbury, Office of Information, broadcast Thursday October 14, 1937, in the Department of Agriculture period, National Farm and Home Hour.

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MR. SALISBURY: Here we are in Washington. And here's Ruth Van Deman coming up to the microphone to tell us what's new in home economics. Ruth, is that some new discovery you've got in that paper bag there? You seem to be taking extra special care of it.

MISS VAN DEMAN: There's a reason. This is something extra special. But it isn't a new discovery. It's something older than history. I'll give you three guesses.

MR. SALISBURY: It appears to be something roundish and fairly heavy.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Right so far.

MR. SALISBURY: And I judge something to eat.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Right again. And I'll help you out this much. It grows on a tree.

MR. SALISBURY: Some kind of a fruit then.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Yes. An all-American fruit. That is native to this hemisphere.

MR. SALISBURY: A native American fruit---round---and rather heavy. Does it begin with A?

MISS VAN DEMAN: You're getting warm.

MR. SALISBURY: Apple, of course. Ruth, have you got The Big Apple in that paper bag.

MISS VAN DEMAN: No sir. Wrong on two counts. What I've got here is something very exotic and tropical.

MR. SALISBURY: Well, I thought the Big Apple was pretty exotic and tropical. It seems so to me.

MISS VAN DEMAN: I agree on that. But the apple that grows on a tree originated in the Old World. And this fruit that I have here makes even alligators dance.

MR. SALISBURY: Alligators?

MISS VAN DEMAN: So the legend goes. I've never seen them do it myself.

(over)

MR. SALISBURY: Alligators - - - a fruit that grows on a tree. Of course. I've got it now. Alligator pear.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Right. Avocado of course is the real name. Being a pomologist's daughter I was never allowed to call it anything but avocado.

MR. SALISBURY: Yes, I know. Avocado is correct, pomologically speaking. Alligator pear is just a nickname.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Just one of the many funny names the avocado has picked up in the course of its long life. Maybe Columbus found avocados growing here when he came to discover the New World.

MR. SALISBURY: And I can imagine him and the other old Spanish conquistadores who came to Mexico and South America, trying to find out all about this strange fruit from the Indians.

MISS VAN DEMAN: They finally got the name down as aguacate--or something to that effect. That was as near as they could come to the original Aztec.

MR. SALISBURY: And now we've anglicized that to avocado.

MISS VAN DEMAN: And added all kinds of funny nicknames like alligator pear ---

MR. SALISBURY: And Sailor's Butter. Don't forget that one.

MISS VAN DEMAN: That's right. Sailor's Butter or Midshipman's Butter.

MR. SALISBURY: Yes, I've heard them both.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Those are about the most picturesque and accurate of all the names the avocado has picked up. At least they suggest the rich smooth texture of the fruit. Which by the way must have been a godsend to the sailors in those old days when there was no such thing as real butter in their ration on those long voyages.

MR. SALISBURY: Those were the days when hard tack was hard tack, Ruth, I've been told that the crews on those old square riggers beating around the Horn, used to gather up all the avocados they could lay their hands on when they got ashore in a port in the Central or South American tropics. And they took them along to sea and ate them as long as they lasted.

MISS VAN DEMAN: And I've heard tell that those were the days when men had scurvy on those long voyages after the fresh foods ran out.

MR. SALISBURY: Yes, I've read some of those grizzly tales. And as I recall it was the effect of lemon juice in curing the scurvy that ultimately led to the discovery of vitamin C.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Precisely. Now we can look back and see that there was a kind of blind instinct in that rush for all kinds of fresh fruits and vegetables when a ship made port after one of those voyages of many months.

MR. SALISBURY: An instinctive attempt to balance the diet, I suppose.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Yes, what you might call a natural.

MR. SALISBURY: Well, Ruth, it's a long jump from the conquistadores and the sailors begging, bartering, and stealing avocados--from the Indians, to take on sailing ships, to you walking in here today with a 20th century avocado bought in a 20th century grocery store. At least I assume that's the way you came by it.

MISS VAN DEMAN: I did, honestly. In the manner of a 20th century American housewife. And I didn't have to pay very much either for this specimen of the Persea americana or Persea gratissima family.

MR. SALISBURY: Nothing extra for that Latin botanical name and all that exotic, romantic, tropical history of its ancestors.

MISS VAN DEMAN: No, the avocado is rapidly taking its place as a regular American salad fruit now that Florida and California are both growing them. Got a knife, Morse?

MR. SALISBURY: Sure. I'll reach down into my boot and bring up my sailor's dirk.

MISS VAN DEMAN: All right. Unsheath your dirk, and cut this avocado open, and have a taste of that smooth, rich, greenish yellow inside.

MR. SALISBURY: Ruth, you sound as though you were an avocado fan.

MISS VAN DEMAN: I've always liked them. My father taught me to eat avocados when I was a little girl, -- just this way, au naturel, right out of the skin with a little salt or lemon juice.

MR. SALISBURY: I've always had them cut up in little slivers in salad.

MISS VAN DEMAN: That's all right too, if there's a tart French dressing on the salad. I'm very fond of a combination avocado and grapefruit salad. Or pieces of avocado in a salad bowl of mixed greens. Or in fruit cup with tart fruits.

MR. SALISBURY: The seed's a big affair.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Yes, the seed is large. But it comes out easily.

MR. SALISBURY: Just this way?

MISS VAN DEMAN: Yes, just roll it out with the point of your knife. Now if you were eating that avocado on the half shell, you could put your French dressing right in that hollow left by the seed, and go right to it with a spoon. I can't provide all the luxuries of home here, Morse, but I did bring along a paper spoon for you.

MR. SALISBURY: Thanks. - - - Say this does cut almost like firm butter or marrow, doesn't it?

MISS VAN DEMAN: No wonder. It may be anywhere from 7 to 30 percent fat.

MR. SALISBURY: Must be the fattest fruit there is.

MISS VAN DEMAN: It is except for olives. And unlike most other fruits it is rather high in protein.

MR. SALISBURY: And is it really very rich in vitamins?

MISS VAN DEMAN: I'd hardly say rich, as compared with the foods that top the lists for the various vitamins. But it does seem to contain some of five of the vitamins that have been discovered so far.

MR. SALISBURY: The flavor's very delicate, isn't it, one of those things you need to be an epicure to appreciate.

MISS VAN DEMAN: I've heard other people say that, but I didn't find it that way myself. I liked it from the start.

MR. SALISBURY: Maybe you're a natural born epicure.

MISS VAN DEMAN: No, I don't think so. Just omnivorous.

MR. SALISBURY: That's a 5 dollar word right there.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Have another taste of avocado, Morse.

MR. SALISBURY: Tell me, Ruth. Are all avocados bright green on the outside like this one when they're ripe?

MISS VAN DEMAN: No, not all. But most of the commercial varieties have a green skin. A few are dark purple, and some have an almost black rough rind.

MR. SALISBURY: Well then, since most of the skins are always green, how can you tell a ripe avocado from a green one when you buy them in the store?

MISS VAN DEMAN: By the good old touch system.

MR. SALISBURY: You mean they should be soft to the touch?

MISS VAN DEMAN: Not soft, just yielding slightly to gentle pressure in the hand. And by that I don't mean that anybody should go in and pinch all the avocados on the store counter. Some of them have a very firm skin almost like a shell. Others have a skin almost as thin as that on an apple.

MR. SALISBURY: Sure. There's such a thing as gentle pressure on a fruit to test ripeness rather than pinching and bruising it.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Then when you cut an avocado, as we did this one, the flesh should be pleasantly soft on the tongue, but not mushy or watery. And

the color should be an attractive pale yellow tinged with green. If it has dark brown streaks and black bruises then it's past its prime.

MR. SALISBURY: Well, the more I eat of this, the better I like it. It's like a very delicately flavored nut.

MISS VAN DEMAN: That's why it always seems to me a great mistake to serve avocado with a thick mayonnaise or cover it all up with a lot of highly seasoned sauce. But when you combine it with a juicy acid fruit like grapefruit or pineapple or orange, the avocado is almost like a salad dressing itself.

MR. SALISBURY: And I should think used that way even one of these avocado fruits of the size of this one here, would serve quite a number of people.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Yes, that's one of the beauties of avocados. One is generally all you need to buy for a salad. Unless you happen to be like me and want to make almost a whole lunch on avocado. Seems to me you're doing pretty well at that yourself, Morse.

MR. SALISBURY: Well, I'll admit your free sample is extremely satisfactory. And I'm glad to know more about the early history of the avocado, and its food value. I believe the Bureau of Plant Industry has taken a very active part in introducing good varieties to growers in Florida and California.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Very much so. The 20 million pounds of avocados that go into the great American salad bowl each year now are a direct outgrowth of the early work of the plant explorers and the growers who worked with them in testing out the different strains and varieties.

MR. SALISBURY: Twenty million pounds of avocados! I had no idea our national avocado appetite had reached that size. Who says Americans aren't epicures - - - Well, Ruth, we'll be looking for you again next week. Can you come on Monday instead of Thursday?

MISS VAN DEMAN: Surely.

MR. SALISBURY: All right, next Monday then. And thank you for this digression today into the past and present of the exotic, romantic, tropical avocado.

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